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**Rich & A
Boer Co.**

MAR 23 1989

WOMEN'S REFORMATORY

the contradiction of liberalism as applied to any oppressed person

The women's reformatory in Rockwell City is the one adult women's prison in Iowa. The prisoner population averages 75. There are 42 staff members. Forty-eight per cent of the women inmates are in on charges of crimes involving bad checks, 30% other stealing, 11% drugs, 8% crimes against person, 3% other crimes. The average age is 27. Twenty-five percent of the women are black.

After only being on what the staff refers to as the campus for about 15 minutes, I was struck by how my image of what a prison is like is based on 1930 crime movies. The prison consists of six or seven white Spanish looking buildings surrounded by a lot of flat land. It does look like a small, quiet college campus.

Rockwell City has no guards, no fences, and no guns - as far as we could see or were told. We were told that women escape often and are not often prosecuted. Many of them return on their own cause they really don't have anywhere to go and getting out of the town itself is difficult. There are signs warning drivers not to pick up female hitchhikers. It's a small town so I don't imagine there is much public transportation. One of the staff members said that if an escapee doesn't return on her own and isn't picked up on another charge, they figure she's doing o.k.

But what really threw me was the number of women there. It seemed such a small number. I had envisioned before going there, thousands of uniformed prisoners being marched around. Apparently federal prisoners from the midwest are often kept there instead of being transported to the women's federal prison in Alderson, Va., and also women sentenced to terms in county jails. By law, women can't serve more than a thirty-day sentence in a county jail in Iowa.

Somehow I imagined that there were more people in prison than there are. I wonder how most people stay out considering how impossible it is to live within the rules of this society if you're not rich and white and even then you break laws often but have the money, knowledge, lawyers and whatever to stay out.

I don't know what the situation regarding mental institutions (there are three in Iowa) is. It is probable that women convicted and sentenced could be sent to one of them instead of the prison, especially if they appeared hard to control..potential agitators.

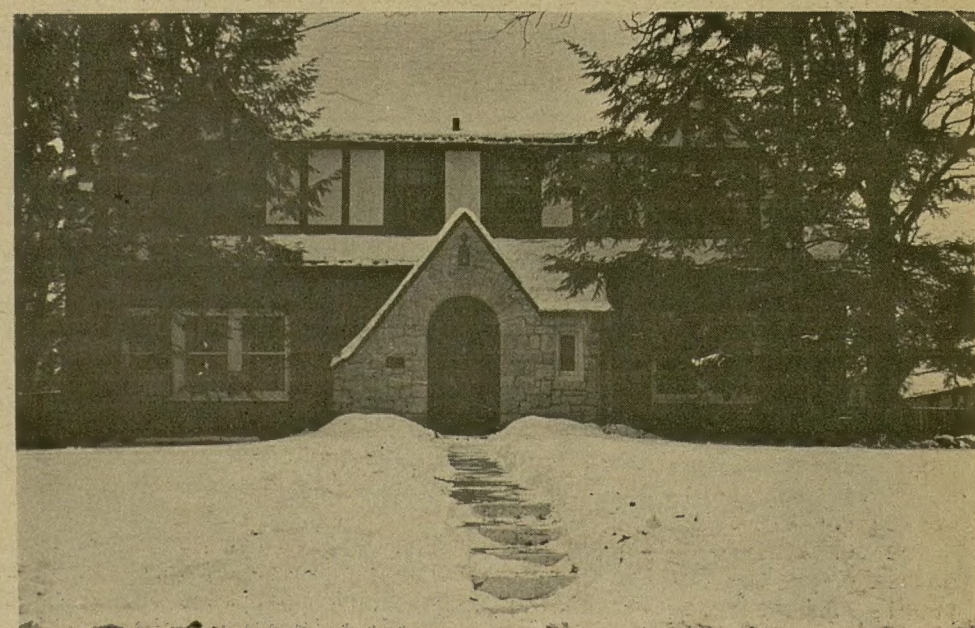
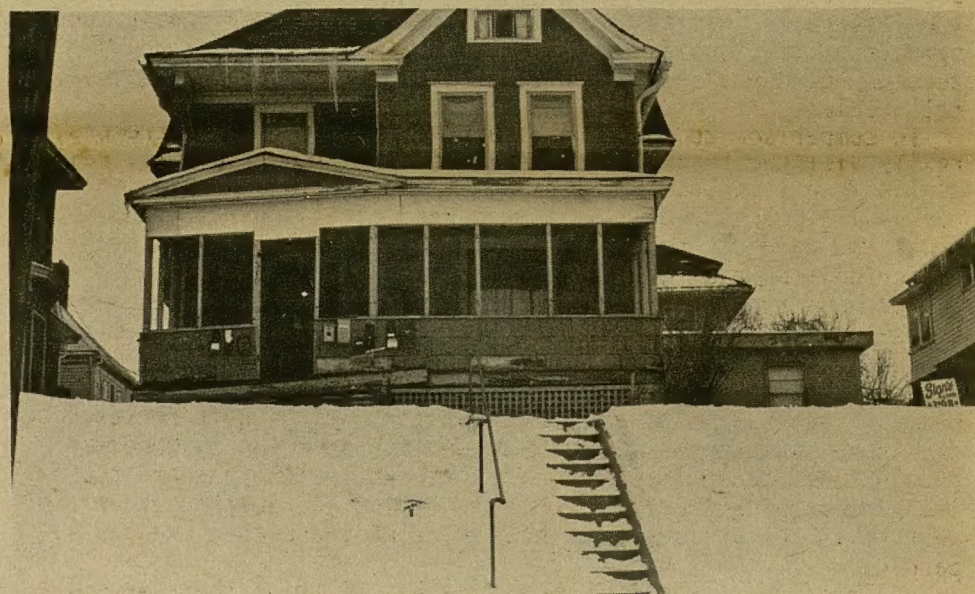
My reactions during the day ran the gambit from utter relief at seeing the place and realizing I could stand it there - could get through a prison term there if I ever had to - to depression and anger at the liberalism and model prison atmosphere by the end of the day of talking to enthusiastic and sincere liberal administrators. The skitzaphrenia of the place really tore at my mind. Recently I had been thinking of prison a lot cause of various conversations and also cause of a change I had sensed in myself as to my capacity to withstand prison. I used to think I would freak out in prison, would never be able to withstand the authority, the fascism, the confinement. But lately I have been realizing my capacity to do what I have to, to cope or at least accept the hassles of my life being gay, being working class, being a woman.

I don't mind office jobs, or factory jobs anymore. My consciousness of class has really just come to me in the last few years - I don't feel above the people I work with on the jobs I've had lately - not like I used to when I was younger, thinking I wouldn't do that kind of work all my life - I was just doing it temporarily until I became a star, rich, something. It took me a long time to realize I was a working class woman and accept joyfully, in a way, my preference for working class jobs as opposed to liberal purposeful university-type work with values I could never relate to. Somehow I can accept and withstand what I have now but I really want a revolution. All the crumbs, the reforms, the liberal consciousness lying somewhere between my life and the revolution I want seem meaningless and unrelated to my life and I don't care much about them. All this that I have been feeling fit right into my vision of prison - forced labor - the rigidity and along with knowing that the people in prison are my people - that in this society my peer group, those I am and I choose to be identified with, are working in what the middle class defines as shit jobs or are in prison.

Anyway, my first reaction to the prison was relief but then as the liberalism of the prison started to show I wondered whether I could stand it. It pissed me. You spend most of your life being trained to accept authority and get by - you build the strength to do that - hassle for a living by other people's rules. . . then after you finally can function, are trained, some liberal changes the rules on you. They don't change the reality, they don't take away the authority, but don't want you blindly following it anymore. You're supposed to challenge it, use your mind, be purposeful! Always to a limit, though, a limit you can never define for sure. The liberals' rules are always hazy. They have to be, if they weren't they would be fascist. And the liberals demand that you love them for their good intentions, love the authority controlling your life because it is a kind one. The staff we talked with endlessly solicited our approval.

And the whole contradiction of liberalism as applied to any oppressed person would really show through. Liberalism doesn't work for the poor or for prisoners. The program at the prison is geared at getting the prisoners out into the freer society as soon as possible. The charts on how this is done were endless and presented with a cheerleader push, push, get ahead. . . The chart "funnel" prescribes clearly the route of cottage #3--cottage #1 or #2--work release--parole in freer society. I think I might be able to withstand being forced to scrub a floor that has been washed 10 times that day, better than proving myself in the achievement-oriented atmosphere.

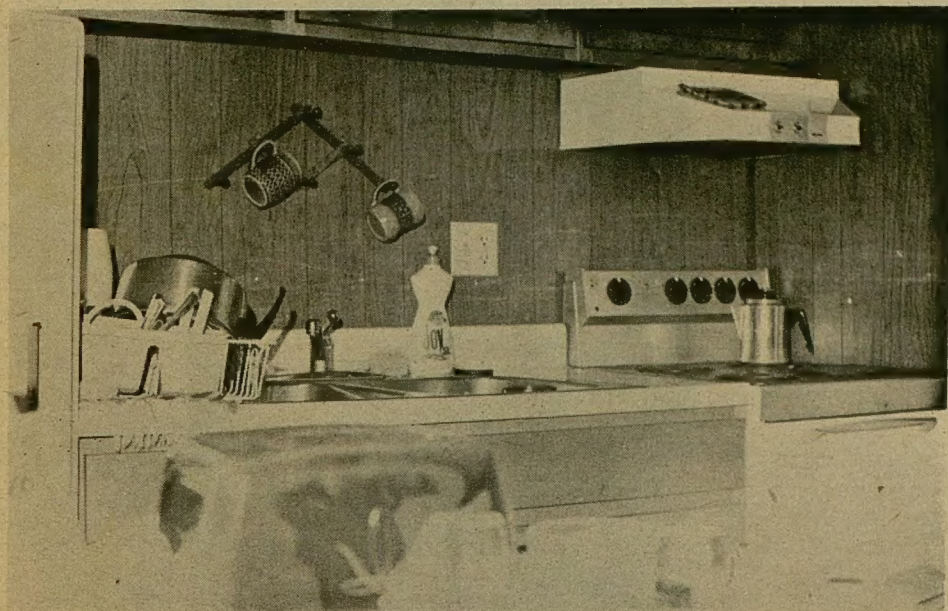
The first person that we spoke with was the Program Coordinator. I can't say I didn't like him. Like all the administrators we talked to that day he was sincere and I really think had the welfare of the prisoners in mind. He also seemed to have a fairly good understanding of the unfairness of things, or the conditions that put the prisoners in prison, how those conditions were not of their own making. And he was cynical but I don't think cynicism went beyond liberalism. I don't think he saw the futility of working with the contradiction of helping the inmates within the prison when the problems lay in the society outside. He described to us the three cottages that the women live in. He had kind of categorized the prisoners living in each one. Cottage three houses the medical department and the infirmary and is where inmates stay on arrival to the prison for assessment and evaluation before they are sent to one of the other cottages and melted into the mainstream of prison society. The medical department seems like a well equipped doctor's office. There are 2 nurses who I believe rotate shifts so one is on duty every day. In addition there is a doctor coming in every week or two weeks and the prisoners can sign up to see him.



I found it difficult to talk to the nurse that was on duty that day. I'm not sure she really understood my questions. Talking to the other administrators we met was actually easy. It was easy to get the kind of information you wanted. Generally I'm pretty guarded with my questions in situations like that--afraid that my politics will slip out, that people will react hostilely that I won't get what I want from them. Even my very guarded questions most of the administrators responded well to. Probably because they were all so liberal and so concerned with making that prison this far out example of prison reform, they would talk on end to my questions. Trying to convince us in a way of their right-on-ness.

I doubt the nurse was so liberal. She had pretty condescending attitudes about the patients. I asked her about the physical condition of the prisoners when they arrived at the prison. Did they as a whole have medical problems? Had they had bad medical care? In reply all she could say was they had bad hygiene and dental problems. I'm not sure if I really know enough to respond to that but I've heard very often from medical people that kind of response about low income and poor people - that those are the two areas that are deficit. This may be the case. I would assume that if you've had poor dental care and have bad hygiene (whatever that means) that there would be other medical problems as a result of inadequate care. This is probably crazy. I didn't have good health care and the first noticeable medical problem would be my teeth. Still I wonder how much classism determines that appraisal. I also asked her if the women request to see a doctor often and what kind of complaints are common. In reply she said they complain all the time, come up with some complaint, really just want someone to talk to, that they really are just like children.

I didn't get the impression that she would take the health concerns of the women seriously and didn't get very definite information from her about the kind of treatment women get there when they



are seriously ill. Supposedly if it is serious they are sent to the university hospital in Iowa city. She also mentions prisoners being sent to Cherokee, a state mental institution. I couldn't determine from what she said whether that applied to exclusively mental problems.

In comparison to the other staff members and administrators, I really disliked that nurse and kept thinking how I really, really wouldn't want to show up there to start serving a term being ill, nor would I want to be ill while I was there. That I wouldn't trust the kind of treatment I would get. And yet I was really uncomfortable with my dislike of her cause I knew that a lot of that was because she wasn't a liberal and all the rest of them were. In reality does she harm the prisoners anymore or help them any less? I don't know. I tend to doubt it.

John described the women in cottage three as in pretty bad shape. They have just arrived to start serving their sentence or are there because they are not deemed fit or ready by whoever judges them either for emotional reasons, health reasons to fit into the regular campus program of getting yourself together and working to get yourself out on work release and then eventually parole.

The prisoners are at different levels (I think that there are three levels or grades) that indicate the amount of privilege given them--being locked in your room for bed at 10 instead of 7, allowed to go on supervised shopping trips to town, etc. The women housed in cottage three would be at the lowest level with practically no privileges.

The women who live in cottage one were described as being more dependent. More dependent than the women he described who live in cottage two. . . who sounded pretty far out. His descriptions of the women in the different cottages came up in his response to a question we directed to him regarding the prisoners' attitudes toward men. We told him that we realized that many of the women were in prisons for crimes they committed with or because of men. We asked him if the women there hate men. His answer was pretty interesting, he didn't flinch and I think he understood what we were asking. He said some of them do and they do because the relations that they've had with men were relationships in which men used them, that they had been used all their lives. Although not a lot of them are in on prostitution, a lot of them have hussled, worked for pimps.

He certainly didn't have a broad analysis on how men in general do use women but let his understanding of it stop at specific people and their specific relationships which happened to have been bad ones. When he was talking about this he referred to cottage two as the one with your more man-hating type, pretty independent, strong women. It was pretty clear that most of the dykes were in cottage 2. We heard references to cottage 2 ranging from admiration to intimidation through out the rest of the day. Nothing he said about it was really very homophobic.

There is one lifer there and we had been asking him about her life, what she does there. He explained to us that she generally gets into very intense relationships and she and her "friend" don't have too much to do with anyone else, are pretty into each other. His only negative reaction to that seemed to be a genuine concern for her pain when her lover leaves the prison. Most of the women there only serve about 18 months time.

We told him that we did want to see a cottage and he called cottage one to tell them we were coming. We were disappointed that we weren't going to cottage 2 but didn't tell him that. At the cottage we were met by a young black prisoner from Davenport, Iowa, who showed us around and who we hit with a barrage of questions, most of which she probably couldn't have answered totally honestly. She showed us the rooms and how the door can always be opened from the outside but once it's closed you can't open it from the inside. So anytime you shut your door you're locked in your room. Also you're locked in when you go to bed. If you need help or are sick at night you're supposed to have your light on and your shade up and the night watchman will come in and see what kind of help you need. Everyone in that cottage had their own room, they were nice, kind of like dorm rooms. Each has a toilet and sink in them.

We didn't have the nerve to ask when people make love. After finding out the door situation that question was really on our minds. I suppose people find ways of working that out. When we were talking to the nurse we mentioned that we had read that prisoners are kept from getting into friendships, that if some-



one goes to dinner with the same person too often, they are separated. She said no and then said, "You mean homos, is that what you mean? We have them here. The psychologists don't think anything of it though. I don't understand it."

While I'm writing this I'm struck by the timidity with which we approached the subject of homosexuality even though the questions we asked which were obviously, even if cowardly, about that were taken well and answered pretty honestly. In reviewing that day I think we could have been much braver about our interest in homosexuality there, and I wish we had been. But the guardedness and fear we have to have just couldn't be dropped even to get information we wanted badly. If I were straight I think I could have asked much more direct questions but being a dyke I was really scared and meekly hinted at that subject. One of the women with me asked much more direct questions and didn't feel that the staff was really all that eager to talk about it. She may be right. I might have been so relieved that they didn't react hostilely that I interpreted the lack of hostility for a willingness to talk that wasn't there.

The prisoners we talked to said that the matrons in each cottage censor the mail going out and coming in. Some of them just spot check for money or things that may be enclosed, some of them check more thoroughly so you can generally see who is on duty and if you know she only spot checks you can get things out.

She was really aware of security and mentioned how you have to think of not just what you're saying in your letter and getting out of the prison but where it's going. A woman who is also a prisoner there wrote a letter to her brother in which she talked about Sally Ann. The letter got out of Rockwell City but was censored when it arrived at Anamosa, the men's prison in Iowa. There was somekind of backlash when word got to Rockwell City that she was writing about another prisoner.

She did say that they will periodically search rooms if there's any reason to suspect that the prisoners have drugs, or liquor or whatever. The prisoners can have their own money, whatever they earn or is sent to them, but the matrons must be aware of what money comes in. I couldn't get any idea if there was any drug traffic there or not. They're allowed to have visitors any day but for some of them, like this woman from Davenport, that's not that helpful cause it's a long way to Rockwell City for her friends and family.

Basically I didn't like talking to the prisoner we talked with and didn't want to talk to anymore. It was so much more schizophrenic. She had no reason to trust us and there was no way to say I think I might be in prison some day and my life too, is a hassle to some extent, more or less than yours, and that I've done half the things women are in that prison for, and that I identify with her not the administration whom we were placating by various disguises just so we could be there. There's no reason for her to believe that or care - no basis at all for us to converse that way. Why should she want to talk? It was all crazy.

She got a call from an administrator saying we were coming. I felt guilty firing questions at her and could only apologize for doing that and be glad to get away, shuffling to another administrator to goggle at what a far out job they've done there, never able to talk to the women I care about and identify with there,

women's reformatory cont.

wondering if the staff noticed my sizing them up in regard to how I could expect to be treated by them, as a potential prisoner, not the socially concerned little shit that they thought I was and thus could relate to.

We went to the vocational-education department next, and it was there that everything I had been feeling all day came to a head and I started to identify the skitzophrenia I had been feeling. A skitzophrenia between the liberal experience (for a prison) that they were attempting to give the prisoners and the real reality of those prisoners lives. They're setting up a program of rap groups, theatre groups, a good library and recreation and have just hired a woman to head that who wants to bring in women's liberation. She's going to some conference in NY and said she was going to try and see Gloria Steinem there and if she won't come to the prison at least she could tape her and play it for the prisoners.

She was incredible. . . energetic and naively optimistic about her crusade to end the apathy she said existed among the prisoners. It was such a contradiction, her enthusiasm, their apathy. All the stuff she talked about trying to get the prisoners involved in seemed so far from the lives they've lead and will lead when they get out. It seemed real similar to me of the experience working class people have going to college and getting into a lot of liberal academic stuff that doesn't really apply - is a real break with their lives previous to that and with many (probably most) doesn't relate to the life they'll live after that either.

I was also struck with the skitzophrenia I felt between my consciousness as a working class woman and my consciousness as just a woman - a kind of tearing between women's liberation and class issues and I realized at the moment this woman mentioned bring in wl that I really had not thought about women's liberation very much at the prison for most of the day. Without conscious pre-meditation my feeling when I got to that prison were pretty much based on class. In some ways that's explainable because it is an all female prison and with the exception of my noticing that a lot of the administrators were male there was not glaring reason to think about sex distinctions.

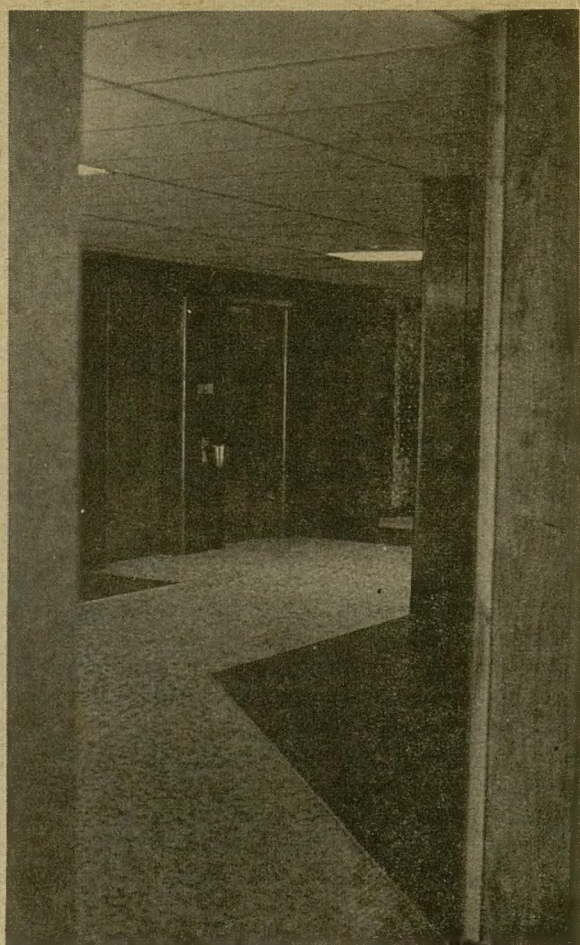
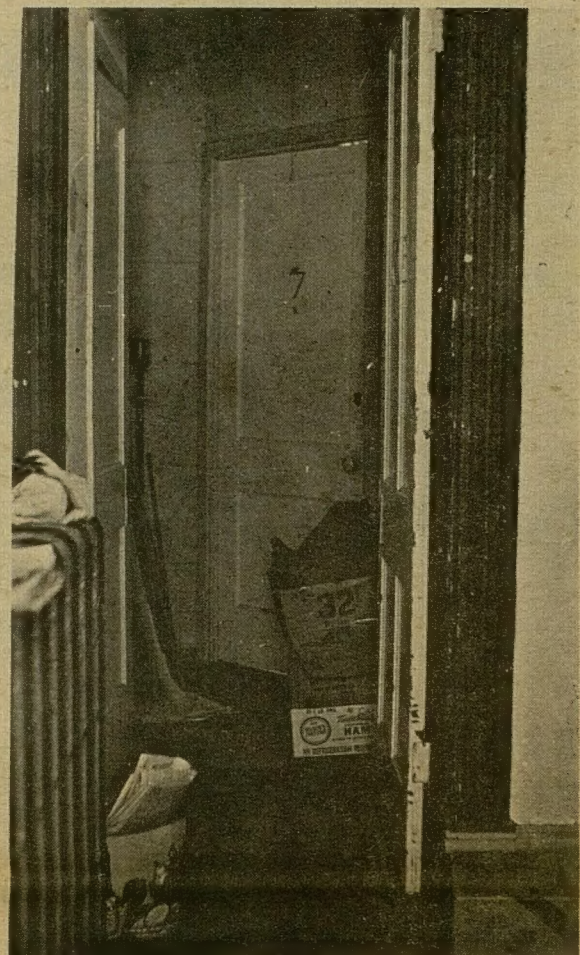
I really felt that most of the women there were there for class reasons, but I don't want to deny that a lot of the women are there because of men, that it is a feminist issue and can be explained by a feminist analysis. That's all true and I accept a feminist analysis as regards female prisoners. I think, though, that it only holds true for certain kinds of women. I doubt there are very many upper middle class prostitutes in jail. Class seemed the really important element that day to me and it was on that basis that I felt an identification with the women who are sent there.

When I heard her say the words "women's liberation" I just cringed. My reaction was based on how I think wl will be presented not just that I thought it didn't have any place there. If it could be presented with a really strong class consciousness and not tainted with the middle class concerns that much of it has, I think it would be good. Gloria Steinem sure couldn't do that. In a way getting into wl is good. It gave me an understanding of the order of power, helped me to see things in light of a material condition instead of analyzing my life only in terms of myself, my failure, my problems. But very often its ideology (from many groups, and many things published) contradicted and made light of or ignored some of the realities of my life.

It's been hardest for me to relate to the womens movement and identify with it in times of financial or some kind of survival crisis. In prison listening to Gloria Steinem or some one like her talking about female executives, I'd freak out or just couldn't relate to it at all. I felt slightly at odds with a couple of the women who were with me that day who reacted very strongly to stuff that appeared sexist. They were real concerned with some "self improvement" courses that we saw advertised around the prison and were asking people about that. One of the men there who is paid by the community college to teach courses at the prison explained that the women got their hair styled, learned about better dress and that kind of thing. My friends displayed their anger at that and this man got angry at them in return, saying that he understood how they felt about those things. He agreed they were a pile of shit, but that we have had that privilege to decide that having your hair styled was a pile of shit and fitting into the female mode was oppressive and that it was on that basis that we decided not to do it, but that many of the women in prison haven't had that choice -- that many of them had never been able to afford to have their hair styled. I really couldn't disagree with him. I think it is a different thing to be immediately blocked by economics so that your consideration of whether something you can afford is worth it or not is like a step you never get to. Not that it didn't help me to eventually come to the decision that a lot of things I had so envied--the nice clothes, the hair styles I saw on other women--were not worth having, were in fact oppressive to women, didn't help me a lot (both financially and to gain self-respect as a person). Still, what I felt the strongest was the anger and hurt at not being able to afford those things that other women could afford. I would have liked the freer choice: to have had money to buy expensive clothes and choose instead to give it to a women's abortion fund.

Similar things happened throughout the day when I felt there was almost siding between women's liberation and class and I tended to identify with what I saw as the class position in any issue.

We talked to the man in charge of vocational training who I thought had a pretty good class consciousness and respectful attitude about the prisoners. But given the material situation of women and especially lower or working class women, his attitude doesn't make much difference as far as what can be done to help any of the women there. There are hardly any jobs period and of course hardly any jobs for women -- ones in which they could be trained and be assured of any job security are pretty much closed to women. And jobs which will be opening up to women will surely be filled by middle class women, women with money to hire lawyers to fight the job discrimination that exists. These will have to be women with a "good background," and generally will even be over-qualified for the jobs. For women the job market offers pretty much its lowest (jobs that don't pay enough to live on and offer little job security) or its higher



on and offers little job security) or its highest (executive or professional positions which are out of the reach of lower or working class women). He certainly seemed aware of all this. The government will fund training for the prisoners there but it is difficult to find anything that they can be trained in and later work at. And none of them can afford the training anyway. If they do want to get into a training program, the choice often is between that and getting out of prison, since the government will pay tuition and \$35 a week (I think he said) to the women and no one can live on that. If you're up for parole continuing a training program would mean staying in prison since you couldn't afford to live on \$35 per week outside of prison. So many of the women choose to find whatever job they can to qualify for parole and get out. Then of course they don't have time for the schooling and so



the viciousness of a class society goes. Some of the women there want to train in nursing but if you've served a prison term you can't become a licensed Registered Nurse in this state. They intend to fight that and try to get that changed. Even so most of the women at Rockwell City serve terms of 18 months before parole; they would start job training or school a few months after they arrived there and nurses' training would take at least two years. Some option.

He mentioned that one woman was taking welding courses at the community college and he seemed pretty proud and happy that they had gotten her into a program that she had wanted. Later two other staff members were telling us about this cottage 2 woman who they felt was fucking up her opportunity -- that she had really wanted to learn welding but was doing badly in it and hated it but had to finish the course before she could get parole. Their explanation of why she was having a hard time wasn't cruel but was pretty shallow. They chalked it up to her feeling unaccepting of herself, feeling unwomanly and unfeminine etc etc. They wouldn't seem to take their analysis any further -- to see how her feelings about herself (an over-six-foot dyke it sounded like) were according to this society and the standards it imposes on women. They thought it would be helpful if they could have gotten her together with another woman welder they know who is little and petite and very feminine so she could see that doing that work didn't mean she wasn't a real woman. They didn't see the reality -- that a dyke is a real woman. They felt the problem was in how she viewed herself, not in how the world viewed her. In describing her to us and describing how she felt about herself one of the staff members said, "Well, she's a stud." I was pretty shocked to hear that word. I don't think he thought he was being offensive. I think he thought he was stating a reality. I kept thinking of this far out big dyke having to go to those classes with probably all men who hate and despise her, facing the sexism and homophobia that must exist in the class, being a freak to them, fighting for her self-respect in a situation that could only eat away at it. The staff (one man and one woman) who we were talking to couldn't really understand that, not enough to be of any help or support.

The staff woman was in charge of the work release program. At some time in serving a term you can apply for work release. That means you can work on campus when there are jobs opened or get a job in town and sometimes get a job and live off campus in a half-way house. Even if you can't find a job (which is probable) and you are qualified for work release, you have more privileges and being on the program brings you closer to parole. To get paroled you have to show you will be doing something -- school or work -- when you get out. Since most prisoners couldn't afford school, they need a job to qualify for parole.

I liked her. She was the only staff member we talked to who didn't have a college education. I think she had a nice attitude--almost identification with the prisoners. She talked about cottage 2 also and about how when she first started working there she was really intimidated by the women in that cottage. She said she used to like to go over to cottage 1 where the prisoners would sit down and talk to her and she could relate to them but the cottage 2 women would greet her with "What the hell are you doing here." She said that later she grew to really admire them, admire their independence and strength at doing things on their own, applying for jobs and things. At this point in the day talking with her I was pretty exhausted and really depressed after listening to so many people rapping about their jobs, being so enthusiastic about liberal reform. I was finding it harder and harder to keep my mind in the necessary mindset of judging the prison within its realistic context of this society now, capitalist, sexist, racist. To try to view it in terms of how it affects the prisoners there, how it would be hard on them, what they would have to stand up against, and also what could help them there--what possibly could be done during their stay that would be of concrete help to them. The only thing I heard mentioned all day that seemed really helpful was a course the teacher from the community college was setting up that would inform the women of social agencies and government help available, what programs there were like food stamps and such, how to hassle with the bureaucracy to get them. Only in this obscene society would that information be privileged, would middle class people know how to get that stuff a lot better than lower class people. I never heard about food stamps or knew I was eligible until I was told by some middle class students.

Beside that course everything else seemed hopeless and I couldn't keep my mind from dwelling on the absolute necessity for a revolution after which the acts that those women are serving time for would not be crimes and/or would be unnecessary. I'm sure people aren't in prison for bad checks in China. I started drifting off to my dream world where the Fords and Rockefellers would

be in prison if anyone was, not the woman we met from Davenport. No doubt about it -- the best prison reform would be a revolution.

All in all I felt good about having visited the prison. I felt excited but I don't know why. I certainly couldn't say that prison is an exciting place to be. It seemed that way (exciting) to the staff because of their purposeful crusade of liberal reform but it couldn't be exciting to serve time there. Given the show the liberals put on for us, I didn't see much of the life the women there must live -- only the authority they must deal with. That would be hard for me. It would be hard to be guarded about your politics or your life in that atmosphere against the touchy-feely T-grouping authority there. And because of the leniency, because they don't hire unnecessary labor and don't seem to make the prisoners do too much, I could see going crazy from boredom. The conditions there don't seem cruel but it would be another story if you freaked out. They could send you to the state mental institution and the conditions there are probably not geared at giving you a positive experience like Rockwell City is trying. I imagine they could be pretty hostile if you didn't like the experience they were breaking their necks to give you. After all they are trying to supply the best they know of, the closest that can be set up to a middle class campus; and if you couldn't relate to that I could imagine them reacting to you -- an unthankful piece of poor bulldyke trash.

The staff knows, I think, the futility of what they're doing. One staff member said he knew that the best a woman leaving Rockwell City could expect was to get married and be supported or she could expect to be back at Rockwell soon. But while she's there they're supplying her with a glimpse of how other people live and even if she buys it when she's there, when she gets out she'll soon learn it's a whole other ballgame. I doubt the women there are that oblivious to the contradictions and maybe that's why they're apathetic.

I want to say that despite how liberal the place is and beside from what I felt about how badly that could affect you, prison would still be horrible and you'd want out. And also that their liberal and permissive authority is just another means of control. I think my excitement came from in a sense coming in touch with something that before had been an abstract -- an unknown that I feared. It wasn't as bad as I thought it would be and it wasn't as good either. But it did become real and not as frightening.

I wake in middle-of-the-night terror
next to the warm sleeping body of my lover
yet alone in the conviction that I am in a prison cell
shut away, suddenly, from all that makes my life.
I sense the great weight of the prison
pressing down on the little box of room I lie in
alone forgotten.
How often do women awake
in the prison of marriage,
of solitary motherhood
alone and forgotten
of exhaustion from meaningless work,
of self-despising learned early, of advancing age
alone and forgotten.
How many women lie awake at this moment
struggling as I do against despair,
knowing the morning will crush us once again
under the futility of our lives.
And how short a step it is
--for us--to the more obvious imprisonment
of bars and concrete
where our sisters lie
alone forgotten.

poem reprinted from:
BY ANY MEANS NECESSARY
Ruchell Magee Defense Committee
P.O. Box 5730
Stanford, Calif. 94305



Women with kids can't just do anything anytime--women with kids often feel oppressed just as gay women did and still do when they are among people who are not conscious of their hassles and their lives. Often women with kids are isolated so that they aren't even aware of any alternative to staying home. It's incredibly painful to think of all the women who are with their kids constantly, thinking that there is no way out, and for many of them, at this time, there isn't. In a way, I think married women with kids have the most elaborate systems for coping with daily hassles that most other people would not be able to bear. I'm sure that one of the main reasons some women just can't get it together to leave their husbands or male lovers is that they get some help from them with the kids which they wouldn't get if they were alone. And that they don't expect their women friends to give them.

It's easy to say "Well, that woman has kids, so she must have wanted them." That's false. There were so many (and are so many) women who got pregnant because they didn't have good contraceptive methods, they couldn't afford abortions, or at the time, they didn't think they could handle having an abortion. When I think how much I've changed in the last 3 years, I have a great understanding of the difficulty of women who had kids and now find that they can't take all that having children involves--they can't do it alone, anyway. A few years ago I would have loved to have a child. Now, I'm incredibly happy that I didn't. It would have meant the possibility of having total responsibility. And I know I don't want that now.

THINGS WOMEN WITHOUT CHILDREN CAN DO TO SHARE

RESPONSIBILITIES OF WOMEN WHO LIVE WITH KIDS

1. Offer to babysit.
2. Ask questions about anything you're unsure of--changing diapers, feeding, etc.
3. Don't expect to like all kids, but don't expect to hate them all, either. The statement "I hate children" which I've heard from a lot of adults, is as despicable as saying "I hate blacks."
4. Child-proof your house. Move poisonous substances out from under the kitchen sink and all other low places. If you have possessions that you don't want played with by kids, either have things out of reach, move them when the kids come over or have a couple of things that kids can play with so they won't get into other things. (Pots and pans and spoons and newspaper are good for babies to play with.)
5. Offer to take kids for weekends or several days to give women with kids a vacation. This could be done collectively with several people helping take care of the kids. This shouldn't just be done for emergencies or special occasions.
6. Don't make women with kids feel embarrassed or up-tight because they have kids. Don't make them feel like they're burdening you when they bring their kids to your house.
7. Make sure that childcare is available for all conferences and meetings. We should make sure women with kids have childcare for parties and social things, too. This should not have to be the sole responsibility of women with children. Women without children should take it upon themselves to make sure that childcare is provided.
8. When you're visiting a home where there are kids, help care for the kids, even when their mother or another person that lives with them is home.
9. When discipline or socialization things come up with kids, go ahead and deal with them with the kid. Don't assume that because a woman had the kid pop out of her that she knows the best way to discipline/socialize or be "right on." Talk with women with kids about all that.

This letter is written to Martha so that I could get all my feelings out about women with kids as opposed to women without kids. What I've felt might be worthwhile to get down.

Dear Martha,

I think we are probably in a situation that is common to a lot of gay women, so maybe if I try and analyze it, it will be helpful to lots of women.

Several months after we started being close, loving friends, I realized that there was a significant part of my life that you didn't relate to--the children I live with. You weren't interested in them or the ways they were a part of our lives (mine and the woman I live with). When you and a lot of my other friends were visiting here, I always felt ashamed of the hassle, chaos and disorder of the place we live. I envied the orderly dinners, quiet evenings, uninterrupted nights and leisurely mornings you and my other friends who don't live with children have. I was hesitant to ask people over because I knew there would be things happening here that would unnerve some people. I was paranoid that some friends didn't come over because of the kids. One night I was alone with the kids and wanted to be with you and several other women. You said you were going out to dinner and that I should come along. I explained that I would have to bring the kids. After a hesitant sigh, you said that you had a headache and didn't think you could take being with the kids. When that happened, I resented both the kids and you. They were keeping me from doing what I wanted/needed to do and you were insensitive to my needs. Kids don't disappear when their mothers have a headache or are depressed or tired--not unless someone takes them away.

Now, after a couple months of feeling undercurrents of hostility toward you and other women who haven't helped with our kids, I know that we have both been guilty of incorrect things. I should have been more honest about my anger, rather than letting it just sit inside me. I should have asked for help when I wanted it. You should have been more aware of my responsibilities with the kids.

When we finally did talk about the whole subject, a lot of things were cleared up. You and other women who don't live with children or work in childcare or have younger brothers or sisters were honest about your problems in getting into kids. When you told me you were afraid of kids because you were worried they would reject you, I was surprised. That thought had never occurred to me. Many women are nervous about not knowing how to do things that kids need done for them--feeding, diapering, etc.

I have a handle on how to deal with everything now. First, you and all other women who are uptight about being around kids should talk about why. Ask questions and if you are unsure about what to do in a situation, we can talk about it. We can show you how to do things children need done for them.

I was afraid to say a lot of this--afraid to be honest about my resentment. I was afraid you would be defensive.

I love and need to escape to your house sometimes--for the quiet. But I would like so much for us to sometimes take care of the kids together. I want you to know them and care about them and love them. I want you to be amazed at the way they learn and laugh when they do funny things. I expect that they will annoy and hassle you sometimes. They do that to me, too.

I can imagine the pain of a gay woman with children whose friends and lovers can't relate to her kids.

10. When in a situation with kid and mother (or woman who kids are used to demanding from) you should even over-compensate. Be alert to what's happening between kid and woman. When the kid always goes to the woman they're used to, it's probably easy to just let that woman "wait" on the kid. You have to tell the kid "you'll get it" and do it.
11. Be sure and discuss all this with the woman, though. It might be threatening to her to think someone is trying to "take over" her child, when her child may be the one person who gives her security and love.

A mother is anyone who accepts responsibility for children and helps care for them. You don't have to have given birth to a child or legally own one, or live with a child to be a mother. Mothers don't need just babysitters (although that's a good start), they need people who will relate to their children on every level—who will become mothers themselves. Many women are afraid to really share their kids because they believe, with good reason, that their children will be hurt by people relating to them in inconsistent ways. Also, for many women, their children's love is the only relationship they are sure of and they fear losing that to any degree. Non-mothers should be sensitive to that and not relate to children out of martyr feelings. I live with 2 children and 3 other women and we all think of ourselves as having equal responsibility. We're all committed to the children until they are grown—we're all mothers. It was scary to me at first because I hadn't been around kids all that much, especially that age group (9-12) and I thought I'd be incompetent. But we've been doing this for a year now and it's the most important part of my life. I think it's really possible to share all the different levels of responsibility and joy that living with children entails. I think it's easy for women who haven't been around children and feel scared and incompetent to get over those feelings and I think children can trust and love adults who they know are genuinely committed to them. Perhaps if we were all mothers, that oppressive word "mother" wouldn't be necessary.

Gay women who have children have much bitterness towards that majority of gay women who don't. One friend of mine, who has a 9-year-old son, recently told a group of lesbians that she had always taken sole responsibility for her child because she was convinced that if she expected any of her lovers to help her they would

leave her, and that she was convinced that mothers would be the last group to be liberated. She, like many other mothers, is just beginning to connect with the strong anger she feels. Lesbians who are mothers know that most non-mothers will not relate to their children, will be afraid to get really involved with a woman who is a mother, and will refuse to admit that they are oppressive to mothers. I know that I'm finding it increasingly difficult to relate to women who refuse to share responsibilities for children—I trust those who are aware of and share my survival needs.

Kids are not just a hassle. They are not oppressive—the institution of parent/child is oppressive. Kids mean a lot of work, physical and emotional, an economic burden—but they also mean so many good things and I feel sorry for women who, because of fear, don't relate to children. I was in a gay women's small group once and one of the women in the group had 2 small children whom she often brought to the group. Several of the women in the group didn't want the kids there, complained that it was noisy and distracting and why didn't she do something with them. She got furious and started crying—"Why do you see children as just annoyances? It's like they are less than animals. These 2 people are my friends, they share their joy with me and teach me so much. I pity you for being so blind."

I see children as such an important part of our community. I know it sounds corny but they are part of our future. Kids give a real stability to your life, they are more whole than adults in many ways, and when they love you it's a real emotion—they rarely fake that. We all talk about how we don't want to be isolated. Well, isn't it isolating to just relate to your own age-group? Our community should—must—consist of all ages, all of us teaching each other.

The majority of women with children did choose consciously to have children, but to brush off their oppression with a shallow "Well, it was your choice. Live with it. Act grown-up." over-simplifies the situation. The fact is that even though we may "choose" to have children, we do not really have a choice. Not to choose to have children either never occurs to most women or makes us feel guilty because of society's socialization process. ("All good women get married and have children. A woman's ultimate fulfillment comes from having children.")

Another over-simplification laid on mothers who have children and don't get out as much as they'd like suggests babysitters or daycare. And these are solutions, but there are a few complications. For example, a woman who works all week-long is likely to feel guilty taking her child to a daycare center. This guilt is laid on women and shouldn't exist; nevertheless, it does—so that solution isn't as simple as it seems on the surface. Babysitters might be easier to deal with, assuming they are friends or extensions of the family, but very often they cost money. Obviously, not everyone has money.

I've always hassled with parents, (including my own,) about their adult and parent chauvinism— and am constantly told that no one can or has the right to replace a child's own parent, that children love their own parents best, (and vice versa,) and, in effect, that I don't know what I'm talking about because I've never given birth to a child myself, let alone ever been married...

I grew up as the oldest of a large working-class family and have had child-rearing responsibilities since fourth grade, half of my life. I've done as much shit work growing up as the women from the daycare centers here have had to do for their own children— and I've certainly done more than the men. What I've done has included house responsibilities like cleaning, running appliances, organizing work, repairing things, and dealing with people coming around for things, and childcare, including shit work, discipline, loving them, and hassling with problems for children close to my age all the way down to infants. Most importantly, to me, I did these things, not as a parent, but as another child, subject to the same hassles from parents. My parents are far from permissive, and they stopped treating me like a mindless fool when I moved out of their house a year ago. When I go home things are still the same, so I'm not very far away from being an oppressed child.

It's likely that the mothers from the co-ops where I work don't trust the capabilities of workers like myself because they're unaware of our experiences. Most of them have led middle-class lives and except for token babysitting, didn't relate to children much until they were married, except as a sibling. However, I do realize the position women are stuck in by a society that dictates parental ownership and superiority. My interest is in relieving a burden, as well as challenging authority. Recently a woman from one of the centers wanted to go on a two week trip and I offered to take her children. I'd offered this before to her and other women, and their reactions were always surprise at someone willing to share or take over the responsibilities of caring for their children. Being a non-parent amazed them doubly.

When women without children that I work with heard about me taking care of these kids for a measly two weeks they all immediately offered all kinds of services and help. My gut reaction was to reject their aid and criticize them for not doing the same for women who are constantly saddled with children. I was also miffed and defensive about the inference that I couldn't handle two toddlers for such a short period of time. This reaction was my own doing, I realize, because I've been getting shit from daycare parents about threatening their authority. I don't think their criticisms are completely valid, but it's still a pain in the neck to hear it, and it's made me defensive. Anyway, these women didn't intend any insult, and apparently they're trying to get into dealing with their failure to relate to kids in the past. I may sound skeptical or critical, but I'm just waiting to see what happens. Good grief, is this what the women with kids around me feel?

WOMEN and



CHILDREN

Self-criticism and Direction

In our last issue we printed a political analysis of the Left and the Women's Movement called "No More Fun and Games." We devoted a third of the paper to the article because it was the most cogent analysis we had seen, and contained important ideas about what is to be done in the future.

The one flaw in the article was the highly offensive sentence, "I believe Lesbianism is a fad right now." We had decided to comment on this sentence at the end of the article, but in the business of lay-out it was forgotten. We criticize ourselves for the omission because it is important to us that we present our politics as clearly as possible. Not commenting on the homophobic remark may have been confusing to many of our readers. So we would like to state now that such a statement is offensive to all Lesbians, and we denounce it.

We also want to include here an explanation about the authorship of "No More Fun and Games." We did, indeed, receive the article unsigned, but we knew who wrote it. It was written by a so-called movement "star." The main drawback to the "star" phenomenon in politics is that groupings develop around or against names, not ideas. We didn't want anyone to prejudge the contents of "No More Fun and Games" either negatively or positively on the basis of its authorship. As has been said before, ideas are not property, and we generally do not credit work we print unless specifically asked.

We learned an important lesson from neglecting to comment on the homophobic sentence in "No More Fun and Games" and the discussion and self-criticism that followed. Several of us were at first unconcerned that we had omitted the comment, and our reasoning went something like this: "The politics of AIAW is strongly presented in the paper, so anyone who read "No More Fun and Games" would realize that we would never agree with such an offensive remark, and figure that we had strong, valid reasons for printing the article anyway."

But after examining that line of reasoning, and thinking about the variety of people who read *Ain't I a Woman?* -- not necessarily regularly -- we realized that there could, in fact, be a great discrepancy between what we thought was coming across as our politics and what actually was coming across. We saw that, because we are a tight collective and discuss our politics and the articles that we print at great length, we have a much clearer understanding of our political stance on most issues than even a regular reader of the paper might have.

In an effort to clarify our politics to our readers in some fundamental way, we want to attempt an explanation of our position. Basically we feel we are working toward a material analysis of this society and its class nature, and to work to destroy the society as it exists -- all from within a feminist perspective. We have

moved away from a strict feminist analysis to an analysis that includes all oppressed groups. We believe there is a great power behind women as a basis for a social revolution, and it is the only structure within which we can work. But that is not to say that it is the only way, and that we don't have a responsibility to every other oppressed group to work for their liberation as well. Basing a revolution solely on the end to your own group's oppression is, we feel, incorrect. We may be more personally concerned with gayness than race, for instance, because it's a gut issue in the group; but basing a whole analysis on gayness is narrow and unrealistic.

Because we are gay women we give weight to the issue of lesbianism in our paper, of course. Gayness and class, economic oppression, health concerns, survival tactics for women alone, etc -- all of these concern us too. They are important, immediate problems that involve us all and should be dealt with, because we live in this society and will have to continue to do so for a long time to come. But when this time finally does come to an end, and the process of social revolution begins, we must be prepared in every way possible. And one important preparation, we feel, is striving to reach a clear perspective of the present society, and understanding the revolutionary changes that are required to insure universal equality and prevent oppression in any form.

SOME THOUGHTS ON FEMINISM AND CLASS

I don't find class priority threatening or in conflict with my feminism, i.e. lesbianism. When I first gained some political awareness of oppression and injustices I knew I wanted to change the system that perpetuates and creates inequality on all levels. That's as much as my awareness comprehended at the time.

From becoming peripherally involved with SDS and RSA, two groups with similar concerns (I thought) as mine, I felt as intimidated by the male leaders as in my high school and college days. It disillusioned me tremendously not to be related to as a human being by these people of noble intentions (working toward equality for all). I was related to as a chick, you know. It took me a while to realize the problem -- because as a woman I certainly attempt to understand other points of view -- as women are taught. Anger finally started trickling out of my pores...anger at the hypocrisy of the goals of ending class oppression espoused by the radical male revolutionary bourgeois student leaders. It's funny, I never felt angry toward any women then, but immediately (and correctly) identified the men as instigating and propagating their class and sex privileges. My mind brought to focus the inconsistency of equality and male dominance. FUCK THAT SHIT!! I can't work for a revolution to enslave myself. I realized being a woman is political!

So I stopped working with the left. And then...women's liberation had a well-advertized meeting. I heard the women (straight mostly) telling of the underlying oppression they'd experienced in left groups, despite the stated goals after the revolution. Well, of course it was a relief to me and something I identified with, so I got into WL.

Before too long I was more and more uncomfortable with the women I worked closely with. The reason: they expressed in verbal and non-verbal ways their uptightness about gayness. I said less and became as careful about touching as I'd had to be with my female straight friends in high school and college. I guess I permanently learned where my head was at from my reaction to this form of oppression from straight women. I stayed and took it. Because I was and am much more comfortable with women -- and usually can deal with their homophobic remarks more honestly than in a situation with a threatened male ego -- I don't mind giving women my energy and emotions -- good or bad. I did not stop trying to deal with and make them deal with their attitudes about Lesbians.

About a year ago, a lot of lesbians stopped working in WL to form gay feminist groups. I was not among those women because I did not see my gay oppression has having more priority in my life than sex and class oppression. I understood the split as gayness vs. womanhood. I felt that women have to work together, regardless of their race or class, or whether they are straight or gay, working constantly to equalize relationships with each other within the women's movement. In my attempts to find a stable, comfortable base for political growth I eventually discovered another distinction I had to make besides feminism.

Gayness. What does it mean and what are the political implications? It is political to be gay...no lesbian with a feminist consciousness should be co-opted into working for a cause that will eventually put her into and under male dominance. With the present understanding I have of our overall situation I don't feel afraid that no one is looking out for the concerns of gay women -- we are gay women! I, personally, have come to resent and distrust straight women who work with men, or live with men, or fuck with men, yet turn to gay women to sap their strength in order to perpetuate a male-oriented part of their lives. Lately more and more women are leaving all remaining male-oriented parts of their lives to the men to perpetuate themselves if they can.

Turning to women for support, love, sex, fun, and political direction, lesbians are creating a post-revolution oriented culture. Yes. Majority, or acceptance, is a new feeling for some of us, and it's a good feeling.

Before I get off on how good it is to be in an accepting atmosphere...I think that without allowing any stagnancy or back-slapping in congratulations at this vast, defiant accomplishment of creating a positive gay space we must turn our energy to the concerns we initially had that made us turn to, then leave, the left. Class oppression is an immediate concern to me.

The recently much-pointed-at dichotomy of class vs gayness has been fuzzy to me. I guess I don't see it as one or the other. I know I no longer feel like giving my strength and emotional support to all women. It is exhausting and frustrating to see my supportive efforts ultimately put to use in feeding a male ego. On another level, yet on the same principle, I can't endorse all gay women. It is hypocritical and counter-revolutionary (defeating) to support middle class attitudes that pad a privileged existence for a few women who I'm supposed to be concerned about because they're gay. I can no longer work with all women, regardless of their race or class, or whether they are straight or gay, unless they, too, are working constantly to equalize relationships. And not within the women's movement -- but among gay women!

Gay women working together to end class distinctions is necessary. In our attempts to create a world we want to live in, in the work we've already done to create that world, we have changed ourselves. Our attitudes. That sounds like social change -- peaceful revolution, or something like that, but I don't choose that as my alternative. I don't find it unhealthy, instead I take it as a sign of seriousness of our intentions. If we can't bring about immediate revolution (who can -- how?) at least we are not turning back to our old places to resume the old ways. We are, instead, using our imaginations and resources to make what changes we can in preparation, in practice. It's not bad or draining our strength for future political action.

preserving our -fingered discount



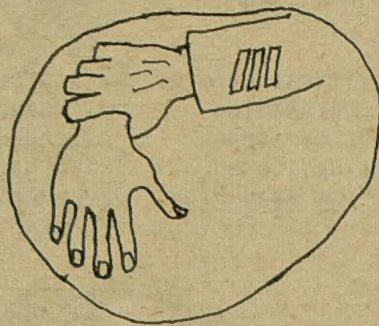
Needing and/or wanting something you know you'll never be able to buy is a futile, rock-in-your-stomach feeling. It used to be a hopeless feeling I had, causing me to feel inadequate because I would never be able to have some of the extravagances capitalism dangles in front of you for incentive. Incentive isn't enough though, they forget to tell you. You need to be white, middle-class, and have money already in order to become a successful capitalist, able to afford more than bare necessities. If you're not white, not middle class, not a capitalist at heart, you might be a five-finger discount artist.

Such discounts can be attempted at most any capitalist business place: a gas station, an office, a doctor's waiting room or hospital, a grocery store, a clothing store, a discount store, a hardware store, a tool shop, a garage, a warehouse, people who can afford it, a library, a music store, a hobby shop, department store, a repair shop, a restaurant. Detection, of course, is what's to be avoided. Piggish capitalists have devices, gimmicks and lackeys to do this and prevent or capture people who do not greedily join the competitive rat race chasing the dangling, elusive incentives, but instead find ripping-off the capitalists as satisfying an accomplishment.

Upon entering a never-before-checked-out establishment business a quick glance across the tops of shelves, scanning walls and ceiling, will reveal any reflecting or two-way mirrors, cameras, or hidden employee stations. Recently these detection devices have been better disguised. The reason, a store owner told me, is deterrent devices are ineffective, and serious detection is now necessary. Just because there aren't any mirrors, or suspicious looking round peep holes in walls, don't relax. Plain-clothes detectives are an expense some stores put up with because they pay for themselves by the many unsuspecting shoplifters they expose. The hidden employee station and plainclothes detectives (male and female) serve as informers and witnesses later. If there are cameras or mirrors, your own discretion and moxie will tell you what you can do. The trouble with two way mirrors is, of course, 1) you may not be sure it's a two way mirror (but any flat mirror high up on the wall in a remodeled building probably is), and 2) you don't know when someone's watching. Also, detectives go to extreme casual disguises to catch people in huge stores.

If you're appraisal of the situation is correct, if you're quick and alert, and together--you should be successful. Purse, coat or pants pocket, coat sleeve or just under your coat, stuck inside pants or boots, or wearing something out of the building (preferable under something you wore in) are usual methods. It's important to be quick, to not look around obviously so you look suspicious, and not to hold yourself in a rigid position once something's under your arm or in your pants. Some women like to buy something to escape suspicion after spending awhile in a store, other times it's advisable to get out fast.

It isn't true that once you've made it to the check out line, or paid for something, you're safe. If someone sees you slipping something off a shelf and into your purse or pocket they may not confront you about it right away, even if it's an employee. Capitalists dig authority, and think everyone is threatened by it. Their reasoning is it's more threatening to the shoplifter (they're psychologists, too) if someone with authority (a gun-a title) is the confronter. Sometimes a uniformed guard with a gun, if he's an off-duty pig, works right in a store. These lackeys "are on duty 24 hours a day, technically," said the PD, and they have the same author



ity to stop, search and arrest at all times, with or without uniforms!

The Code of Iowa (709.22) permits any merchant or employee to detain a larceny suspect. That well-publicized information is meant to be threatening. What they conveniently don't inform people of is the right to refuse to be searched. Also in the Code of Iowa (709.23) it's stated that, "unless in the presence of a peace officer, the one to be searched must give permission." So don't be intimidated by, "will you give me what you have under your coat or do you want one of the girls to search you?" They can't do it unless 1) you give your permission or 2) there's a pig there. Male pigs, by the way, can search both sexes.

If you know you can get away -- do it. Some employees and managers will be astounded that you're not crying and apologizing and turning yourself over to them. They'll be too shocked that you're trying to get away to do anything about it. It depends. If you run, you can be shot! That's right--"fleeing felon" (someone who's stolen over \$20.00 worth of merchandise) is the term that applies, and plenty of people have been shot for misdemeanors--but that isn't legal--but often too late to ask. Is it any consolation that you're case would be thrown out of court? If you escape (there's a chase) with over \$20.00 of stuff, dump it immediately! A felony-size rip-off usually provokes store owners enough to request search warrants. They might come and look at your place if you're recognized.

One chance of getting around a direct accusation naming a specific item is playing really cool, denying you have it in your possession, and directing attention elsewhere. Like saying you dropped that item in another aisle, or you returned it to the shelf, diverts attention and gives you a chance not to be further detained. That is the purpose of this tactic--to get away. If you don't get away, you've sort of implicated yourself.

If there's no way out of getting charged and you are detained until a pig comes, keep cool. The consequences are humiliating on several levels, that's about all. After a quiet ride to the police department, the arresting officer officially writes up the charges and books you. Small talk isn't necessary, unless you can get valuable information from a rookie cop. For petty larceny (under \$20.00) in Iowa, unless you have \$20.00 for a first offense fine and \$5.00 court costs, you are put in jail until your arraignment. You need cash -- a friend or bondsman can bring it to you. Grand larceny (over \$20.00) in Iowa has a sentence of not more than five years in a state prison or over 1 year in the county jail, and/or a \$1000 maximum fine.

If you wait for a pig to come to take you into custody, and you have over \$20.00 worth of stuff (a felony) listen carefully to the pig. He has to warn you of your right to remain silent (which he doesn't have to do if it's only a misdemeanor). If he doesn't and you can get the names of witnesses, their case against you will have a legal flaw you can use in court. Whatever you do, don't ever confess (even in custody) or provide evidence or information of your guilt. They'll search you to get it, but don't just hand it over at the first accusation.

If you have a set of fake identification you could use them for a misdemeanor charge. All you have to show is something with your name on it, and they ask your present address. I think it would be easy to falsify that information. The pig will probably thoroughly search you at the police station. If you give them a rough time, they might trump up some other charges like resisting an officer.

An arraignment time is set up. By not appearing for a misdemeanor charge, you forfeit your bond money since the judge assumes you're guilty. By appearing for it, you may plead not guilty with or without a lawyer. If there's a witness (a camera, an employee or casual observer) there's not much point in appearing. If you appear, you may still be fined the bond and court costs. Don't fail to appear for a felony arraignment because they'll go as far as a warrant for your arrest on that charge.

With all the hassle of an arrest, incentive is high to not get caught. In Iowa City the statistical profile of a shoplifter is female, black, young. One legal source I consulted estimated 90% of the shoplifters in Iowa City are women. The stores most frequently prosecuting shoplifters are Me Too grocery store, Osco drug store, K-Mart, and the Stable clothing store.

Extortion is an illegal but much used method capitalists resort to to detain a suspect. They act friendly, suggesting if you pay (2 or 3 times the worth) for the merchandise they think you have they won't call the pigs. Sometimes they don't but often they do -- and keep the money -- and there's nothing you can do to prove they've done something illegal unless you happen to have gotten a written receipt for what you paid them.

Psychological warfare against being caught is fairly effective. If you're prepared to act insulted, defensive, strong, defiant--talk back and possibly push--your chance of getting away is increased. One way to prepare for the actual confrontation is to play charades. Act out being confronted and what you'd say and do. A good preparation is to have in mind ahead of time a plan of action. If you're with another person you should both know what you're going to do if one gets stopped.

It's best, too, to find out your rights in whatever state you're living in or visiting, since the law varies. Not all state laws permit store employees to detain you like the Iowa law does. Some states are stricter in defining detention methods and fines are higher.

Remember that rising prices are not caused by shoplifters, the explanation so many capitalists find to make people turn in suspects. The economic system in this country is at fault, and there ain't nothing we stop ripping off that's going to ever lower prices.

VD in the US:

how it concerns women

Venereal disease in the US has been labelled by the medical profession and the news media as an epidemic. And certainly the numbers of reported cases of gonorrhea have risen sharply in the last few years. In this country VD is called a "social disease," and as such is thought of as the fault of those in society who suffer from the disease and spread it. Similarly, the detection and treatment of VD is left in the hands of a proportionally small medical elite and a relatively powerless government department of health.

In reality VD can be stopped only by a massive political effort: that is, strong direction, funding, and education of paramedics provided by a government concerned about great numbers of its people; and an educated people enthusiastic about the dedicated work needed to bring VD to an end. (See the excerpt from *Away With All Pests*.)

What is gonorrhea?

Gonorrhea is a disease caused by an organism called gonococcus. It can enter the body through the skin; it does not need an open sore or cut to penetrate into the system. Unlike syphilis, which involves the entire body, gonorrhea often remains localized on or near the reproductive system or rectum. If it goes unchecked it can cause irregular periods, cystitis in the bladder (inflammation and infection of the bladder and urinary tract), proctitis of the rectum (an inflammation), and sterility as a result of built-up scar tissue in the Fallopian tubes.

What are the symptoms in women?

More than one-half of all women with gonorrhea have no symptoms at all in the beginning. Generally the symptoms are like other vaginal infections. There is usually a slight discharge, yellow or yellow-green, and minor irritation when urinating. The glands in the genital area may swell and cause pain. Symptoms of later stages include severe lower abdominal pain, vomiting and fever.

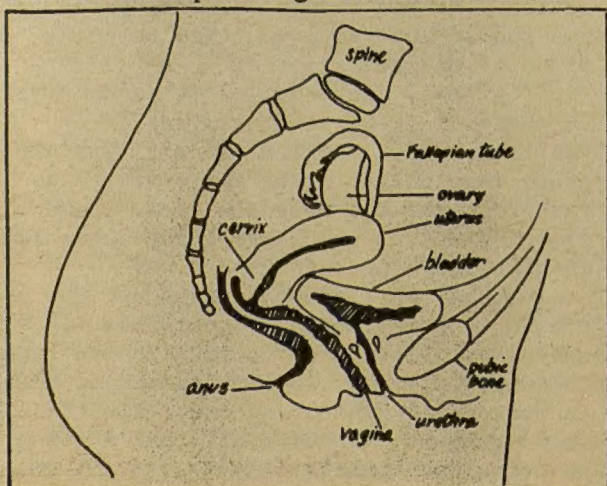
If you regularly examine your cervix with a speculum, light, and mirror (see Vol. 2, No. 4, of *AIAW*), you probably will not notice much change. The cervix usually appears normal, but there may be a slight film across the cervix or a pus-like excretion.

In any case, DO NOT DEPEND ON SYMPTOMS. If you believe you've come in contact with gonorrhea, GET TREATMENT. If you have sex with someone who has VD, you will get VD.

How is gonorrhea transmitted by gay women?

If a woman has had numerous sexual partners, none of whom have had bisexual partners, then the chances of VD are almost non-existent. If a bisexual enters the cycle then the possibility exists but the probability depends upon the number of women participating in the cycle.

The organism for gonorrhea is transmitted by sexual contact. Fomite transmission (that is, contact with towels, toilets, etc. previously used by someone with VD) is exceedingly rare. The organism lives in the mucous membranes of the urethra, cervix and vagina, rectum, mouth and throat. Therefore, gonorrhea can be transmitted by these contacts: genital-genital, oral-genital, genital-rectal, or oral-oral (via the penetrating tongue). The transmission by hand would have to be almost immediate. This is hard to the infected part, where it picks up the infected mucous, and then hand to susceptible genitalia or mouth.



What should I do if I think I've been exposed to gonorrhea?

Go to a clinic or doctor. Tell them you believe you have been exposed to gonorrhea. They should do a "Thayer-Martin" test, which involves taking a culture from the cervix and/or the throat. If both partners in lovemaking have performed both roles in the oral-genital act, then the cervical swab probably will be sufficient. However, if you performed only the oral role, then a throat culture must be taken. Generally it is best to have BOTH cultures taken. When a throat culture is taken this must be noted on the record the doctor makes to avoid misdiagnosis because of other bacteria (meningococcus) which are usually found in a normal throat.

If you have questions for your doctor about VD in gay women you probably won't get absolutely reliable answers. Most doctors are going to be embarrassed by your questions and aren't going to have the answers. They don't know what gay women do when they make love, so they don't know much about how gay women can communicate VD. Because of this they'll be confused and try to cover for themselves.

If you want a test for VD, demand the test. You know more about yourself in this regard than most doctors.

What about treatment?

If you are convinced you have been exposed to VD the doctor may go ahead and treat you without taking a culture. Treatment consists usually of 4.8 million units of penicillin (2.4 million in each buttock). This dose is large enough to be 100% effective in most cases. If you are allergic to penicillin, a substitute drug will be administered.

Be sure to check back with your doctor for the results of your test. Don't trust your MD or clinic to let you know. If a doctor tests you and doesn't treat you, says "If it's positive I'll let you know," don't wait around. Call back and ask, because doctors can forget or medical records can get waylaid. You owe it to your lovers and your peace of mind to get an answer.

What happens after I've been treated?

If you've been treated without a culture, or if you had a positive culture and then were treated, you should have another test in two weeks to make sure no VD remains in your system (there may be resistant strains of VD which were not eliminated by the treatment). Doctors and clinics don't always say to come back, and the request for follow-up testing may be met with some resistance or down-playing if the necessity. Nevertheless, insist upon it, because it is important to know no gonococcus remains in your system.

To be sure you don't infect someone else, you should not have sexual contact with anyone until you have your second test.

Although we could easily expect enthusiasm from the people to help get rid of VD, there is no indication that the needed programs have any priority in the US government. Capitalism would show no profits from such an undertaking, and human benefit never weighs much when balanced against the dollar in a capitalist society.

So we must do what we can ourselves, understand how to recognize and prevent the spread of VD among ourselves, and learn how to go about getting (perhaps demanding) proper treatment.

The information in this article concerns gonorrhea in women, and contains specific information for gay women. We have concentrated on gonorrhea and the following discussion of VD refers only to gonorrhea, not syphilis. Syphilis is not as widespread as gonorrhea because of a relatively simple blood test, called the VDRL, which is done routinely and catches many cases. Gonorrhea is much more difficult to detect in women.

Does drinking affect VD?

There is no valid reason why alcoholic beverages, in moderation, cannot be taken when a person has VD or is undergoing treatment for a VD infection.

SECURITY CONSIDERATIONS

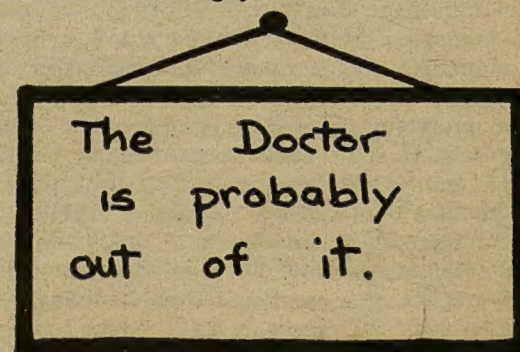
1. When you have a VD culture made and are given treatment, your name will be given to a state health agency. This is required by law. Also, social workers will probably interview you and ask the names of your "contacts." You should expect this and decide before you go what you will do. You can easily register under an assumed name either at a doctor's office or clinic. You should pay your bill in cash to avoid identifying yourself with a check or home address. You can pay at the time of the visit, or arrange to bring the money in later. (A check with a straight gynecologist's office revealed that the whole process, including office visit, two cultures and treatment, would cost around \$30. You can call beforehand to find out exactly what the cost will be at your doctor or clinic so you can get the cash together beforehand.)

Another reason to use a fake name is that state boards of health can demand medical records from doctors or clinics, and courts can subpoena them. So don't trust a place just because it's free or hip. Even "free clinics" must follow state health regulations.

2. Again, you should decide beforehand whether or not to give the names of your contacts. YOU CAN REFUSE TO GIVE ANY INFORMATION.

We think gay women should refuse to give this information to social agencies. But if someone gets VD, the gay community should take the responsibility of alerting its members and taking the necessary steps. You could call a meeting of the gay community -- this means everyone, because everyone deserves to be alerted and make her own decisions and conclusions about whether or not she has possibly been infected. If a large meeting is impossible, those women who are aware of the presence of the infection in the community should conduct a thorough follow-up, attempting to alert any women who might have been exposed. This will take a lot of work, but it is extremely necessary. You should notify all the women who have been lovers with the infected person, and notify each of their lovers, and so on, until you are convinced that you have done everything possible to alert the entire web of people involved.

We must organize this way both for our own security and protection. We should be prepared to take responsibility for ourselves and our gay sisters.



VD in China:

concern for the people

Away With All Pests, by Joshua Horn, is an excellent book about pre- and post-revolutionary China from the perspective of a British doctor who has lived through those times. The following article is excerpted and quoted from the chapter "The Conquest of Syphilis." We feel it is inspirational, and directly relevant to our article on VD.



ACTIVE VENEREAL DISEASE HAS BEEN COMPLETELY ERADICATED FROM MOST AREAS AND COMPLETELY CONTROLLED THROUGHOUT CHINA.

This is a sweeping statement but I am convinced that it is true. Syphilis is a 'social disease' -- that is, a disease whose incidence and spread (and, as we shall see, its decline and eradication) are dependent on social and political factors.

The social and political factors responsible for the hold it gained in China are as follows:

- imperialism and colonialism; subjugation of the people and wrecking the economy. Syphilis was introduced into China in 1504 by the colonialist powers.
- war (implied by imperialism); rape and spread of syphilis.
- poverty (caused by capitalist exploitation)
- drug addiction (caused by imperialism; Britain and the US sold opium, morphine and heroin to China in huge amounts)
- prostitution (caused by poverty and drug exploitation)
- attitude toward women characteristic of a class society which sees women as inferior to men, as their chattels and playthings.

In pre-liberation China syphilis was estimated at a rate of 3 to 5% -- that's 35 million people.

The anti-syphilis campaign, begun about 1951, was waged along these lines:

- elimination of prostitution. Prostitutes were taught trades and jobs were provided for them. They learned why they had become prostitutes under the old order and the new prospects open to them under the new Government.
- transformation of the position of women. This has not been completely changed, but great strides have been made.
- elimination of poverty. No one starves. The economic roots of prostitution and crime have been cut forever.
- mass campaigns against syphilis.

Here is Horn's account of how it was done.

New methods of case finding

To find the millions of cases of latent syphilis scattered throughout the country was an immense undertaking which could not be tackled along orthodox lines.

Opinions were divided as to how it could be done. Those with conservative, stereotyped thinking urged greater working efficiency, more personnel, better and speedier methods of blood testing and more expenditure. Theirs was a purely technical approach.

Those who could think in a bold, revolutionary way urged a political approach, with reliance on the initiative of the masses as the key to success. The political approach won out, although not without a struggle....

In a county in Hopei province, after prolonged discussions between political and medical workers, a form was drawn up asking ten questions, an affirmative answer to any one of which would suggest the possibility of syphilis. These ten questions contained 'clues' such as a history of a skin rash, falling hair, genital sore or exposure to the risk of infection. To draw up the questionnaire was one thing; to persuade tens of thousands of people to fill it in, honestly and conscientiously, was quite another thing. To do this intensive propaganda and education was carried out by anti-syphilis fighters who were able to make close contact with the people, give them the concept that they should liberate themselves, and enlist them as allies in the struggle. Propaganda posters were put up in the village streets, one-act plays performed in the market place, talks given over the village radio system, and meetings, big and small, held night after night at which the purpose of the questionnaire was explained and the co-operation of the peasants gradually won. The opening talk would be brief and to-the-point and would go something like this: 'Comrades, syphilis is a disease that was bequeathed to us by the rotten society we have thrown out. It's no fault of yours if you have syphilis and no shame should be attached to it. It's only shameful if you cling to your syphilis when you can easily get rid of it. We've got rid of the landlords and the blood-sucking government that looked after *their* interests and now we have a government that looks after *ours*. We have a Party that speaks for us and shows us how to go forward. Now it calls on us to get rid of syphilis and we should seize the opportunity. This form asks ten questions and you should answer them honestly. We will be glad to help any of you who can't read or write. If you don't remember the answers to some of the questions, ask your friends and relatives. In fact, there's nothing wrong with friends and relatives jogging your memories even when they're not asked. This is *our* country now and we should all be concerned about the well-being of everyone else.

'Comrades, we're going forward to Communism and we can't take this rotten disease with us.'

At first in some places the response was slow; few villagers filled in the questionnaire and some of those who did so, concealed one or other of the 'clues.' More propaganda was done and more meetings were called at which the main speakers were those who had already been diagnosed as having syphilis and had been cured by a few injections. They told of the mental struggles they had gone through before admitting to the clues, and of their feelings after they had been cured. They recalled the brutality and indifference of the old days and contrasted it with the present.

The trickle of diagnosed cases increased until it became a torrent. News of the questionnaire, spread by political workers, attracted peasants from far and wide who came to the treatment centres eager to be diagnosed and treated.

All those having clues were given a blood test and it was found that one in twenty of them actually had syphilis. This reduced the problem of case finding to manageable proportions, but the skeptics were not convinced. They said this method was too crude, that it was not scientific, that politics couldn't diagnose syphilis, that it wasn't known how many cases had been missed. Accordingly, the Research Institute decided to test the method, improved in the light of experience, in Ningtu county, Kiangsi province, where the VD rate was known to be high.

The People's Communes assembled three thousand volunteers, some of whom, after suitable study, were given the political task of mobilizing the people to regard the fight against syphilis as their own fight. The remainder were given a seven-day course on the principles of diagnosis and treatment, at the end of which they examined some 3,000 people under the scrutiny of experts, who checked on their results, questioned them, and watched them perform blood tests. Eighty per cent of the trainees passed this stringent practical and theoretical examination and thereby qualified to work independently. One old professor, who had been particularly skeptical, examined a trainee for twenty minutes without getting a wrong answer to his probing questions. He then graciously expressed his complete approval in the classical Chinese phrase, 'I bow to the ground with all the five points of my body.'

The campaign went on for two months, covering not only syphilis, but also such diseases as ringworm of the scalp, leprosy and malaria. Forty-nine thousand cases were examined and treated.

Then the results were checked. Some 30,000 people who had been 'processed' by the trainees on the basis of the questionnaire were given a full clinical and serological examination by qualified doctors. It was found that 90.2% of all sufferers from venereal disease had been discovered.

The value of the mass line method had been conclusively proved and the baffling problem of finding one case in a hundred or one case in a thousand among 500 million peasants had been solved.

In the National Minority areas, this method was not suitable and total population surveys were carried out.

In the cities, several case-finding methods were used including examinations of selected age groups, of service trade groups, of army entrants, of those about to marry, of pregnant women and of residents in particular lanes and localities. In some cities, the whole population was covered; in others, only those sections who were particularly at risk. In Shanghai, where the VD rate at the time of Liberation was as high as five percent, the whole population was tested and to do this some 3,600 technicians were trained to perform the rapid fresh blood slide for syphilis, which gives an answer of ninety-two per cent accuracy within twenty minutes and which requires only two drops of blood from a prick in the ear.

Active treatment

Once the sufferers from syphilis had been discovered, treatment was a relatively simple matter although this, too, aroused some controversy around the question as to whether or not trainees with little knowledge and experience should be allowed to give treatment. Some elderly doctors with a strong 'closed-shop' mentality, argued that it would be unethical and unwise to allow such people to carry out treatment. But the Ningtu experience refuted their arguments and, moreover, it was obvious that for many years to come there would not be enough fully qualified doctors to carry the work load.

Penicillin was proved to be superior to all other forms of treatment and Chinese antibiotic factories were by now producing enough to supply all domestic work needs, leaving a surplus for sending to impoverished newly-emerging nations.

Criteria of cure

The new approach to syphilis demanded a concept of cure which extended beyond the individual to include the whole community. The criteria for community cure were strict. They included the finding and treatment of all existing cases, a total absence of new cases appearing in the community, disappearance of congenital syphilis in new-born babies, and normal pregnancies and pregnancy outcomes in previously treated mothers. When these criteria had been fulfilled and maintained for five years, the community was considered to be cured. This has already been achieved in most areas and soon, with continued follow-up measures to detect the rare case of recurrent or congenital syphilis, it will undoubtedly be reached throughout the country.

That is how China, once the so-called 'sick man of Asia,' became the first country in the world to conquer syphilis.

Away With All Pests, Joshua S. Horn, M.D., Monthly Review Press, 116 West 14th Street, New York, N. Y. 10014.

...it's a sex object if you're pretty
and no love
or love and no sex if you're fat
get back fat black woman be a mother
grandmother strong thing but not woman
gameswoman romantic woman love needer
man seeker dick eater sweat getter
fuck needing love seeking woman...

joy is finding a pregnant roach
and squashing it
not finding someone to hold
let go get off get back don't turn
me on you black dog
how dare you care
about me
you ain't got no good sense
cause i ain't shit you must be lower
than that to care...

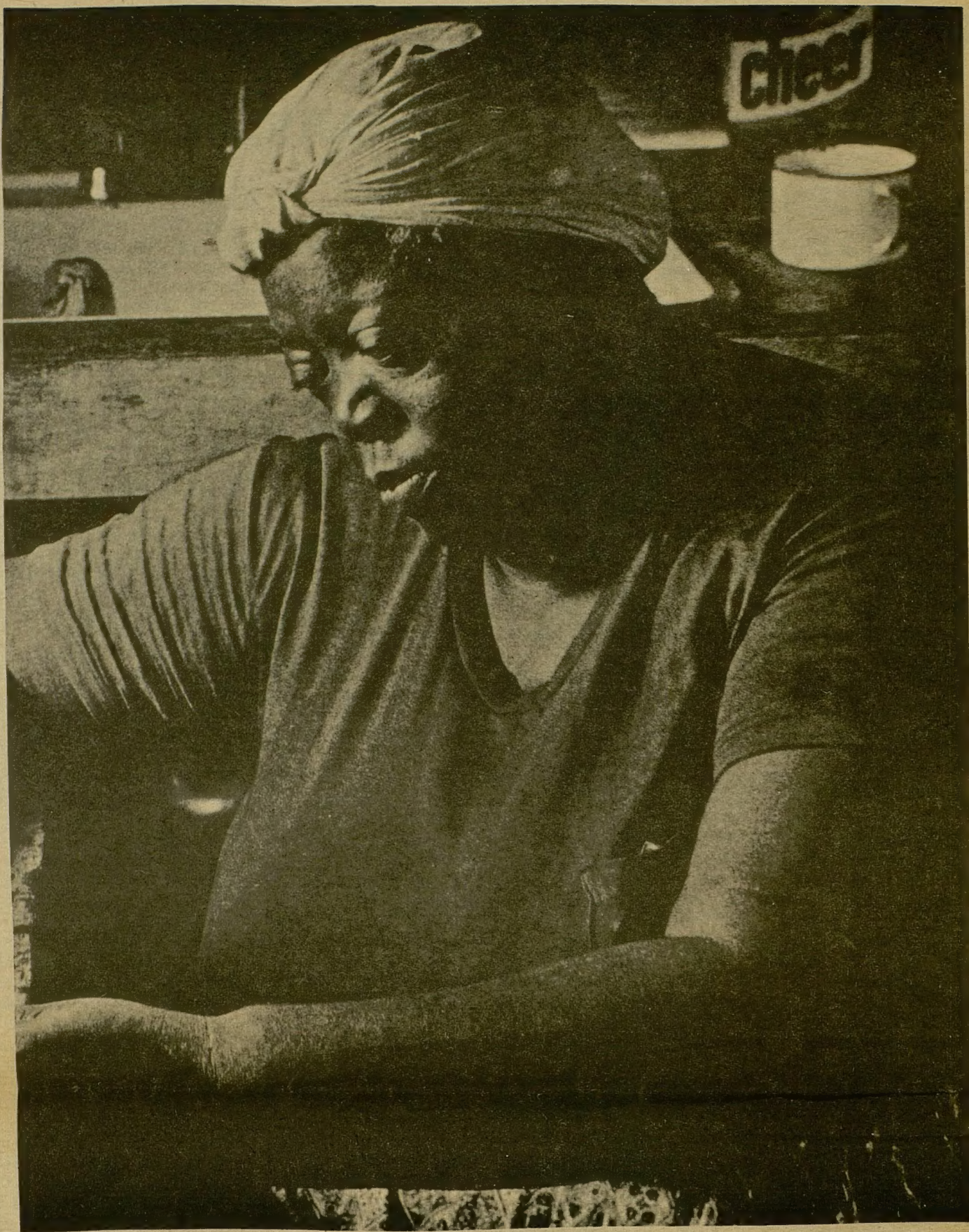
but smiles are only something we give
to properly dressed social workers
not each other
only smiles of i know
your game sister
which isn't really
a smile...

whose whole life is tied
up to unhappiness
cause it's the only
for real thing
i
know"

Nikki Giovanni

poem reprinted from:

BY ANY MEANS NECESSARY
Ruchell Magee Defense Committee
P.O. Box 5730
Stanford, Calif. 94305



DEAR SISTERS:

I just had a long talk with my girlfriend, who is also Gay and 16 now, it was about sepretist politics. I was saying Gay women should come together more and stick together, she was saying that in every Gay except DOB, Gay Women's Liberation Front and Radicalesbians there are Gay men, we both agreed that me and her should go more often to the all-womens Gay groups more, instead of trying to (with a few other Lesbians) represent Lesbians in Gay groups such as GAA (Gay Activists Alliance) mainly because they are mostly male and the few female Gay groups are very small, because so many Lesbians are involved with straight sisters and Gay men, so we decided to give more attention to other Gay women, who have the all-women's groups, instead of the sisters who belong to the GAA etc., but to them also. Shit, did i just make sense?

One thing we had an argument on was the fact about judging a Lesbian first about her Gayness then about her as a person. We agreed that we're PEOPLE, and that labels put upon women such as "gay" or "straight" just divide women, because male society teaches women to be "straight" and to ignore us, the Gay women.

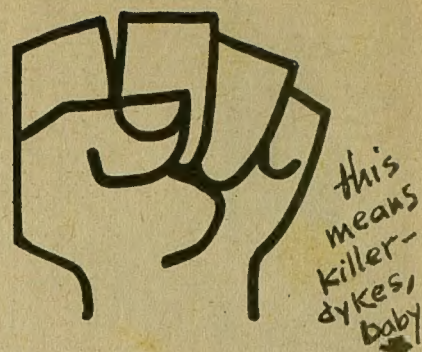
So we just want to say ALL WOMEN ARE LESBIANS, no matter how absurd that sounds, all women are capable of loving and giving energy to other women, if they want to. Me and my girlfriend don't agree on everything, like I ONLY GIVE ENERGY TO WOMEN, BUT SHE ALSO GIVES IT TO GAY MEN, so i'm sepretest (i only go with women, unless i have to be with Gay men) i only go to women, but here i am back to the names "gay" and "straight". i said all women

are Gay, right? well i also give energy to so-called "straight" sisters, in the women's movement, and out. Of course not all "straight" sisters like Lesbians, so I have that problem. I REFUSE TO ASSOCIATE WITH "STRAIGHT" MALES. My girlfriend is right about the LABELS, "straight", "gay" and "bisexual" she's right but unfortunately those labels exist because of the way people are, and the way "society" is. At least Gay men aren't as bad as straight men, because they don't hassle women as much. Of course most Gay men hate women, not all women, just as we don't dig men, as for me i can't stand a lot of men, but that doesn't mean i can't associate with them if i HAVE TO. I'd rather prefer being with women only, but in this world it is impossible to be seperated from men. Unless you stay with other women, in all day, or form all women communes (not a bad idea). Unfortunately, not many women do form all womens open communes, they're usually a tight collective not open to a lot of other women interested. Did you ever read SPECTRE? It's about sepretist Lesbians who ONLY give energy to women. Any way, they always talk about how we should come together more, I think they are right on, but HOW can we get together? It's not easy, just as it's not easy being new in a group or coming alone to a meeting, and not knowing anyone there get what i mean? That's what me and my girlfriend were talking about, we both don't have many other friends, so we decided to go to those groups together and to make new friends, besides helping the Lesbian movement, since we're Lesbians, we shouldn't have our own little world for ourselves and seperate ourselves from other Gay women, so we hope to really come out more with our gay sisters.

When I'm horny I bet I'll think of you and how for this whole time my pants are always wet and yet there is no guilt or embarrassment like usual--This obsession with you just pleases me thinking of little more than the next time you can touch me and I'm full of pleasure all the time enjoying my expectation Involved on other levels before I used to fear the shame attached to what I thought this would be like and now that I'm here see that those feelings belong to the perceptions of that other level and have nothing to do with this time and reality of wanting to make it with you all the time

My fears too have been unfounded that allowing myself such pleasure I would detach those other feelings of compassion, understanding so involved with the animal in my women's body pressed against your women's body my lust consuming me becoming a sphere of sensation twirling and throwing off the other feelings I am afraid to lose touch with Floating under the command of the twinge in my cunt Never did I see before the detachment as just the momentary suspension of my other selves to allowance for that part of me to live and rule unhampered for these moments by the other realities of my life

I come to some point
in my day
when I know I can't take it.
I don't crack anymore
and feel little anger.
I just go home and drink.
It numbs the confusion
that outside my door brings.
And when I can't busy myself
with a chore of some kind,
I try to figure out important things,
like how to make a revolution.
But I keep remembering
the bathroom down the hall
being too dirty to use with comfort
and that I must roll some cigarettes
so I don't buy any--too expensive.
And sitting alone in this place
no sound, no music, just my mind
and visions of the mad woman
I will become
older and still must drink enough
to not go crazy
from knowing nothing is changing
be high enough
to fall asleep quickly
before I notice
there is only one lesbian in my bed.



AIN'T I A WOMAN? is published by a collective of 16 women functioning as a world-wide conspiracy of Radical Lesbians, and don't you forget it.

PLEASE EXCUSE US FOR NOT CREDITING "The Elephant Poem" in our last issue. It was reprinted from EDWARD THE DYKE AND OTHER POEMS by Judy Grahn

1018 Valencia St.
San Francisco, Calif.
94110

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Ain't I A Woman?

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NAME _____

sub. \$5.00 institutional \$20.00

Ain't I A Woman? is sending this issue of the  furies  to all who receive our paper. It is a new lesbian feminist paper from Wash. D.C. It comes out monthly and is \$5 a year. ♀♀